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SUBJECT: SOMALIA: ETHIOPIAN OFFICIALS DISCUSS SOMALIA WITH
AMBASSADOR YATES

Classified By: Political Officer Ted Harkema for Reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. On September 25 US Special Envoy for Somalia Ambassador John Yates, Ambassador Yamamoto, and Poloffs met with State Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Tekeda Alemu and separately, with National Security Advisor Abay Tsehay. On September 26 Ambassador Yates and Poloffs met

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with Acting Chief of Staff to the Foreign Minister Abdet Dribssa to discuss Ethiopia's views on Somalia. Tekeda insisted that Ethiopia would not be drawn into a quagmire in Somalia and stated the Ethiopian military would withdraw rather than allow that to happen. Tekeda also stated his government had smoothed relations between President Yusuf and Prime Minister Ghedi for now and was attempting to reform the Transitional Federal Government's (TFG) security forces. Abay echoed Tekeda's comments, asked for financial support for TFG security reform, and asked for support for the peacekeeping process in general. Abdet commented that, although there were problems between Yusuf and Ghedi, Ethiopia would ensure the issues between the two TFG leaders did not devolve into open conflict. END SUMMARY.

TEKEDA: SOMALIA MAKES YOU HUMBLE, BUT NO QUAGMIRE FOR ETHIOPIA

12. (C) Tekeda told Amb. Yates that Somalia "makes one humble." He declared Ethiopia would not be drawn into a quagmire in Somalia, and underscored, "you can rule it out completely." Tekeda said the Ethiopian military would withdraw to its borders to defend Ethiopia should the Somali political process collapse. On the volatile situation in Lower Juba, both Tekeda and Abdet maintained that Ethiopia had no intention of intervening militarily on the side of TFG forces. They said Ethiopia has consistently urged the TFG to address the serious political issues through dialogue rather than force.

13. (C) On the issue of Yusuf-Ghedi relations, Tekeda stated that "his people" were talking to both leaders and the immediate crisis had passed, although much remained to be seen in the coming days and weeks. Tekeda assessed the TFG leadership was in disarray and the situation might make it possible for TFG opponents to gain traction. He said his government was considering calling both men to Addis Ababa

upon Foreign Minister Seyoum's return from New York to discuss their issues. The near term problem was the lack of a unified security structure for the TFG, according to Tekeda. He revealed that Ethiopia, in the previous several days, had told Yusuf and Ghedi they would no longer be permitted to maintain separate militia forces. He noted that how the TFG would reform their security forces was up to the Ethiopian military commanders on the ground in Mogadishu.

ABAY TSEHAYE: TFG SECURITY FORCES NEED ASSISTANCE

¶4. (C) National Security Advisor Abay Tsehaye emphasized that TFG security forces, including both the army and police, needed to be built up to improve their capability and create more favorable conditions for the deployment of peacekeepers. Abay asked that the United States help get the donors on board with supporting peacekeeping efforts and help financing the building of the TFG forces to prevent external actors from spoiling the political process. When queried why more African troop contributors had not yet deployed to Somalia, Abay responded at first it was because of security, but now it is because of financial reasons, in particular the lack of sufficient resources provided by the international partners of the AU.

ABDETA DRIBSSA: YUSUF AND GHEDI, GLASS BROKEN OR HALF-FULL?

¶5. (C) Abdeta, amplifying Tekeda's comments from the day before, cautioned that although there were problems between Yusuf and Ghedi, the current situation was more favorable than a "broken glass" situation where the TFG dissolved into chaos. He opined that the problems between Yusuf and Ghedi

ADDIS ABAB 00002978 002 OF 002

would continue, but insisted that there would be no open violence between the two camps while Ethiopia remained in Somalia. Abdeta also stated Yusuf would not easily be able to replace Ghedi until the parliament had endorsed the recommendations of the National Reconciliation Congress, which would allow the Prime Ministership to be filled by a non-MP. Abdeta commented that Ethiopia's priority was to patch the relationship between Yusuf and Ghedi and reform the TFG security forces to a unified command.

¶6. (C) COMMENT. None of the Ethiopian officials displayed any particular loyalty to Yusuf or Ghedi, acknowledging both leaders were guilty of failings, but the officials appeared resigned that to keep the TFG process moving forward both should continue in office until elections can be held in ¶2009. The officials viewed Ghedi as expendable, but were concerned that his departure could result in the unraveling of the TFG. Tekeda's comment that Ethiopia will withdraw from Somalia before becoming embroiled in a quagmire is probably intended in part to motivate the international community into increasing support for the TFG and the peacekeeping process. While the Ethiopian army reportedly wants to withdraw from Somalia at the earliest opportunity, the senior political leadership of Ethiopia appears to recognize that the military for now must stay to keep the TFG afloat. Tekeda's comments on Ethiopia directing the TFG's security sector reform were the most explicit confirmation to date of what everyone has assumed about who is calling the shots on the TFG's military strategy. END COMMENT.

¶7. (U) Ambassador Yates cleared this cable.
YAMAMOTO